

Finance & General Purposes Committee

Minutes

Friday 24th November 2023

9.00am

To be held at Lanscove House

Present: Ben Thorne (Chair)
Nicola Dunford
Cheryl Mathieson
Paul Waterworth
Christopher Norman

In attendance: Deputy CEO - Mr Matt Matthew (DCEO)
Finance Manager – Louisa Taylor (FM)

No	Item	Action
1.	Welcome and Apologies The Chair opened the meeting with a welcome.	
2.	Declarations of Business Interests The CEO is a Trustee for the Bearnas Education Foundation. Chris Norman is Director of CANE Properties Ltd.	
3.	Any Other Business No other business was brought forward by the Trustees.	
4.	Minutes of the previous meeting The minutes of the meeting held on 29 th September 2023 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.	
5.	Matters Arising (not on the agenda) No matters arising were raised.	
6.	<p>Finance Several reports were circulated before the meeting.</p> <p>The FM provided the one-sheet latest funds balances report for the committee showing the year-to-date position for each school along with the forecast year end for schools and the Trust. The following comments were provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The FM reported that there was a deficit and went through the reasons for this. The main reason was due to staff investment – across all the staffing areas. It was noted that due to the healthy reserves the Trust was able to do this. The supply budget had also increased along with the educational resources budget. The repairs budget had been increased as the DFC money could not be used for repairs and maintenance. The FM gave a school-by-school breakdown – reporting that overall the schools were performing better than expected due to Element 3 funding and cost savings. The CEO commented that the increase in the high needs funding was reflected in the increase in the staffing. The FM said that currently Bearnas provides a higher contribution to the catering operation as the calculation is based on free school meals. However, it was considered that this was disproportionate and needed to reflect a fairer picture. <i>The Trustees asked questions of clarification.</i> The Chair suggested that when presenting the individual schools' financial position, to strip out the central funding/expenditure thus leaving only what the individual school had control of. There was a discussion about considering moving towards GAG pooling. The Trustees commented that the one-page summary was very useful, and it showed that the IMP forecast was much more accurate. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was a discussion around the new schools joining the Trust and the financial impact on the overall Trust's finance. <i>Following a question from the Trustees</i>, it was confirmed that the financial implications were raised during the due diligence process and actions were in place. The CEO went through the actions which generated further discussion. It was agreed that a supplementary report would be presented at each F&GP meeting to drill down on the schools with high financial changes to track their progress throughout the year. • <i>The Trustees asked whether the staffing percentage reflects the higher number of EHCPs</i> – The FM confirmed that it does which was why some schools showed a higher percentage. <i>The Trustees queried about one of the school's staff percentages which was felt to be higher than expected.</i> The CEO explained that it was due to logistics of classrooms which was being addressed. • <i>The Trustees asked about the growth pupil numbers where the school was over PAN and whether it caused any problems.</i> The CEO said that it was currently feasible however there was a CIF bid to increase the capacity of the school. The meeting discussed the other schools where the PAN numbers were lower. It was noted that these schools were still financially viable. • The Financial Statements from the Auditors were only made available the previous day so there had not been the time for them to be scrutinised – the Chair said that he would review them with the DCEO. • The meeting had a discussion around the reserves. The DCEO presented the meeting with the options on what reserves were needed if there was an emergency. It was noted that arguably the reserves could be lower as the Trust increased in size the risk of all the schools having an emergency at the same time was highly unlikely. The DCEO presented potential areas for further investment, future growth, staffing, capital including sustainability and school improvement. It was noted that staffing had already been increased to support the schools to bring better outcomes for the pupils of the Trust. The Trustees noted that raising standards was a priority. The CEO said that the schools were careful with their staffing levels and spending. The CEO and DCEO reported that the central business team needed to increase as the Trust grew. The Trustees stressed that the Academy Heads should be involved in some of the decision making to understand the financial position of the Trust. The meeting noted that due to the DCEO successfully keeping a prudent hold of the Trust's finances, the Trust was still in a strong financial position especially compared to other Trusts. It was agreed to have £850,000 as the target reserves level. It was agreed that the free reserves could be invested in the areas mentioned. The Chair agreed to pull together a report to outline the spending. <p>It was noted that taking the reserves into consideration, the overall financial picture of the Trust remained strong. The revised budget 2023-2024 was agreed by the Trustees.</p> <p>The Trustees thanked the Financial Manager for her work on the budget.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The feasibility study was still outstanding and would be addressed once the growth in East Devon was clearer. 	<p>FM</p> <p>Chair/ DCEO</p> <p>CEO</p>
7.	<p>Property</p> <p>A report was circulated before the meeting outlining the H&S, capital projects, planned works, RAAC surveys, CIF applications and sustainability. It was noted in the report that the estate projects were having a positive impact on pupil and staff experience as the learning environment in several schools across the Trust had been enhanced. The DCEO reported that there was still outstanding works on the CIF projects. <i>Following a question from the Trustees</i>, the DCEO said there was no actual deadline however he had asked for all works to be completed by Christmas. The Estate Manager was now predominantly working on preparing for the next round of CIF bids, pulling together reports and evidence. The CIF deadline is 14 December. Tenders had been sent out. The DCEO reported that he would present a report to the F&GP committees once all the information was available. <i>The Trustees asked about the needs of individual schools.</i> The DCEO reported that the risk of school closures existed for Harbetonford and Hennock as the roof at Harbetonford had worsened further, whilst the ageing</p>	<p>DCEO</p>

	<p>heating loop at Hennock was showing increased signs of corrosion and deterioration. Patch repairs were providing temporary fixes but these were becoming more frequent. Also, the increase in pupil numbers at Cheriton Bishop (20 in Sep 23) now means the school is 30% over capacity in buildings that have life expired.</p> <p><i>The Trustees asked for an update on the continuing issues of water ingress to the gable end at Ilington.</i> The DCEO said that an alternative had been suggested by the contractors and once this had been completed (expected around December) the internal rooms would be addressed.</p>	
8.	<p>Human Resources No additional comments apart from staffing mentioned under 6. Finance. The CEO outlined the key personnel changes. It was reported that the AH of Wolborough would now become the Executive Head of Wolborough and Bearnas.</p>	
9.	<p>Health & Safety The Health and Safety report from the H&S Lead was circulated before the meeting</p>	
10.	<p>Data Protection The DCEO said there were no issues to raise. The DCEO has agreed a centralised GDPR software license that would enable the DPO to record FOI, SARs and aid in the completion of Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA).</p>	
11.	<p>Safeguarding CEO reported that there were no issues. The CEO said the Trust was looking at a more Trust-wide consistent approach to safeguarding reporting and was looking at different software.</p>	
12.	<p>Risk Register Trustees reviewed the Risk Register report that was circulated before the meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial - there was an amber financial risk around the budget. It was noted that the meeting was aware of the risks. • Estate • Operational <p>Trust Risk Register to be updated post meeting to reflect the review by the Trustees.</p>	DCEO
13.	<p>Strategy Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial strategy and control – Ben Thorne – BT said that the reporting had improved. • Estate management – Chris Norman - CN said that he had met the Estate Manager. The first year was about the baseline, understanding where the Trust was in areas such as energy use to then consider the improvements. CN added that the Estate Manager was making a positive impact. January 2024 had been earmarked to look at sustainability. • Growth and Capacity – Paul Waterworth - PW reported there were two aspects – external growth and internal growth. The GP was asked to recirculate the growth plan. It was noted that growth was discussed at the Away Day on 6th November 2023. The CEO gave a brief outline of the growth plans in place currently. It was noted that 2 schools were expected to join the Trust within the academic year 2023-2024. Following a request from the Trustees, the DCEO presented the cohort numbers across the Trust – it was noted that the Trust was being proactive in attracting pupils through social media, open events and advertising. The DCEO said that though there was not a definitive process to wholly analyse the success of the advertising, in the areas where he was able to obtain feedback, it looked promising. <p>The DCEO asked the Trustees that after reporting in a meeting to update their areas of the Strategy Plan</p>	GP
14.	<p>ESFA Bulletins There was nothing significant to report.</p>	
15.	<p>Policies 15.1 Charging and Remissions – It was noted that Trustees had reviewed the policy before the meeting, made some minor amendments and there were no further comments. The Trustees approved the policy with the changes.</p>	

	<p>15.2 Accounting - It was noted that Trustees had reviewed the policy before the meeting, made some minor amendments and there were no further comments. The Trustees approved the policy with the changes.</p> <p>15.3 Procurement and Tendering - It was noted that Trustees had reviewed the policy before the meeting. <i>The Trustees asked whether the process outlined in the policy was followed by the Trust.</i> The DCEO agreed that he would review the policy again with CN. This policy was postponed, to be presented at the next F&GP meeting.</p> <p>15.4 Central Fund - It was noted that Trustees had reviewed the policy before the meeting. It was agreed to combine this policy with the Reserves and Investment policy. This policy was postponed, to be presented at the next F&GP meeting.</p> <p>15.5 Reserves and Investment – It was noted that Trustees had reviewed the policy before the meeting. It was agreed to combine this policy with the Central Fund policy. This policy was postponed, to be presented at the next F&GP meeting.</p> <p>15.6 Financial Procedures Management - It was noted that Trustees had reviewed the policy before the meeting. It was suggested and agreed that the Procurement and Tendering policy was included in this policy. This policy was postponed, to be presented at the next F&GP meeting.</p>	<p>DCEO/ CN/GP</p> <p>DCEO/ GP</p> <p>DCEO/ GP</p>
16.	<p>Evaluation of governance impact – Principle 1: Delivering the Academy Trust’s charitable Objects https://www.charitygovernancecode.org/en</p> <p>It was felt that the discussion around the reserves would enable the Trust to better deliver the charitable objects.</p>	

The meeting finished at 11.10 am